

to actually rally Members of both parties behind serious ideas that can actually pass. We think the country could really benefit from his positive leadership.

His next test will come soon as the new Congress works to develop the kind of budget the American people deserve. We are going to focus on growing the economy from the ground up, with more future-oriented reform, more jobs, more opportunity. We are going to pursue ideas that make government leaner, more efficient, and more effective. We are going to honor the hard-working men and women who count on us to spend their dollars wisely, not offload Washington's problems onto them with higher taxes. That is what the American people expect. It is the kind of practical agenda you pursue if you are serious about helping the middle class. It is what I hope the President will now encourage Members of both parties to work toward.

The truth is, there is a lot we can achieve with constructive, bipartisan cooperation. The bill we will vote on tomorrow is a great example of that. Members in both parties agree it is time to pursue positive reform for veterans who are hurting. The Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act aims to reduce the tragedy that befalls too many of our heroes and the heartbreak that befalls too many of their families. We lose thousands of veterans every year to suicide. Now is the time for practical, bipartisan action to do something about it.

The legislation we will vote on tomorrow will provide more of the suicide prevention and mental health support our veterans deserve. It will help veterans transition from Active-Duty service. It will take steps to improve the effectiveness of programs to help heroes in need.

This bill has already passed the House unanimously. I hope we can achieve a similar result in the Senate and send this bipartisan legislation to the White House for signature.

Before I finish, I would like to thank both the senior Senator from Georgia, Mr. ISAKSON, and the senior Senator from Arizona, Mr. MCCAIN, for their tireless work on this bill. These Senators care deeply about the men and women who give everything—literally everything—to protect us. Veterans are lucky to have such strong champions on their side.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

EXPRESSING MY APPRECIATION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is really good to be back. I appreciate the kind remarks of the Republican leader. Senator MCCONNELL and his lovely wife Elaine have been very good to Landra and me over the years. We appreciate their words of support.

I want to express my appreciation to my colleagues who have been so kind and thoughtful during my recovery time. The Presiding Officer—I received your phone call. That was very warm. I very much appreciate it.

WORKING FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, as Senators, our work is measured by what we are able to accomplish for the middle class, what we are able to accomplish for the American people. I have watched very closely and been in touch, as we all know, having read all the stories, of what has gone on here in the last month. I am sorry to say that we spent 1 month on a bill calling for the importation of oil from a foreign country and then exporting that oil outside of America. I am glad we were able to work it out so that we had a number of amendments. That was really good. We felt very comfortable with that. I wish we could have done some more, but I am satisfied with what we were able to do. Of course now we await the action of the President, as we should be doing.

The work of this Senate is based upon—should be based upon—what we are able to do for the middle class. We are a constructive minority, and we proved that the last month. To show how constructive we are, take for example TRIA, terrorism insurance. It is so important up and down the Las Vegas Strip, Times Square, everywhere in America. That is important to the business community. Yet that was held up in the last Congress by my Republican colleagues. To show our good faith, we were able to pass that in a matter of hours. That is the way it should be.

We are going to vote tomorrow on the Clay Hunt bill. That is an important piece of legislation. I have worked hard on suicide prevention. We need to keep working on it. Each year in America 32,000 Americans kill themselves. That does not take into consideration the car accidents that are not reported properly, hunting accidents. We have about 24 veterans who kill themselves every day in America. We believe that is important for America, and because of that, we are going to pass that in a matter of hours tomorrow. That is the way it should be.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY FUNDING

Mr. REID. Mr. President, there is an issue that is now before this body. It is an important issue. All we need to look at is what is going on around the world—terrorism attack in Australia; terrorism attack in Canada; in France, scores of people killed. We saw what happened in Belgium. Terrorism is for real. Senator MCCASKILL said it about the best way I have seen it described. The Republicans are more afraid of the DREAMers than they are of ISIS. By the way, ISIS said they are coming our

way. Why should we be dealing with issues that have nothing to do with homeland security?

We should pass a homeland security bill with no strings attached to it. That is where we are going to wind up. If the Republican majority in the House and the Senate wants to have a CR for Homeland Security—a continuing resolution—that would cut about \$1 billion out of the budget for Homeland Security.

Homeland Security was developed after 9/11. It was a bipartisan piece of legislation that consolidated 22 different government agencies. We need to get that done and sent to the President in a clean fashion. If my Republican colleagues have some problem with something the President has done on immigration, for example, hit it head-on. Do not hide behind Homeland Security. We need a safe homeland. I hope my Republican colleagues will join us to get that done as quickly as possible.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, what is the order of business on the floor of the Senate at this moment?

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is in morning business.

WELCOMING BACK THE MINORITY LEADER

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, first I wish to welcome back my colleague and friend, the minority leader of the Senate, Senator HARRY REID. I was told he was coming back. I found a way to avoid a blizzard in Chicago to be here with him because I wanted to be here for this moment.

It is a great moment for those of us on the Democratic side of the aisle to have him back. I know it means a lot to him. We have been on the phone. I know he has gone through a lot in terms of his injury and also his impatience at home when for a period of time he could not read a book, which he loves to do, watch television, or do much of anything. I know he was anxious to get back in the saddle and back here, and we are so glad he has returned.

His message at the outset shows he may be scarred and beaten up, but there is no diminution of the fighting spirit that HARRY REID has brought to the Senate floor on so many occasions with his opening remarks, reminding us we are going to embark this week on a question about the funding of the Department of Homeland Security.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY FUNDING

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, of all things, the Department of Homeland

Security, created to protect America from terrorism, is a Department that is underfunded by Republican design. The Republicans refuse to give the regular budget appropriation to the Department of Homeland Security to protest President Obama's Executive order on immigration. The House of Representatives went so far as to add five riders—conditions—to the budget for the Department of Homeland Security and send them here. They have said they will not fund this Department unless we join them in what has become an extremely negative and, I believe, hate-filled attack on people across America.

Saturday we had a rally in Chicago, and at that rally was Secretary Jeh Johnson of the Department of Homeland Security. Joining us were Congressman LUIS GUTIÉRREZ of Chicago, the mayor of Chicago, and literally hundreds of people, many of them DREAMers—young people who are now, because of President Obama's Executive order, allowed to go to school and work in America.

Remember, these were children—toddlers, infants—brought to America by their families, who are undocumented through no fault of their own. They have lived in America, they have been educated in America, they have pledged allegiance to our flag in their classrooms, and they have no future because we have not changed the immigration law to give them a chance. But President Obama has given them a chance. DACA is a program where, when these young people sign up for it, they can be protected to live in America without fear of deportation—to work here, to go to school here, and to start to realize their dreams. They even want to volunteer for our military. Many of them do. They are trying their best to be part of America's future, and the President gave them that chance.

The House of Representatives—the Republican majority—said: We will not fund the Department of Homeland Security to protect America against terrorism unless the Senate will vote to literally deport the DREAMers.

At a time, as Senator REID said, when we are threatened with ISIS, when we are sickened by the images on television of innocent people—including Americans—being beheaded, at that same time the Republicans on Capitol Hill are telling us: We are not going to properly fund the Department of Homeland Security to protect America unless we can protest what President Obama has done for 600,000 young people protected by DACA.

Senator REID quoted Senator McCASKILL, who spoke up at one of our meetings the other day, who said: Apparently the Republicans fear the DREAMers more than they fear the terrorists, more than they fear ISIS.

That is wrong. I do not know who cooked up this political strategy. They were not thinking clearly. If they were thinking clearly, we would fund that

Department with a clean appropriation—one that is now sitting on the calendar of the Senate that was offered by Senators JEANNE SHAHEEN and BARBARA MIKULSKI. It is sitting here. By unanimous consent, with the approval of the majority leader, we could pass it today, fund this agency.

I asked Secretary Johnson: Well, what difference does it make if you get a temporary funding bill or a regular budget bill?

He said: I can't properly run this Department. I am wasting time and money. I am not investing in things that make us safer because of the way Congress—in this case, the House Republicans—insists that they will not properly fund this agency.

It funded every other agency of government except for the Department of Homeland Security. What are they thinking? Why would they want to make an object lesson out of this critical Department?

I said to Secretary Johnson: So what types of things can't you do?

He gave one example. He said: We give grants for research to find ways to make America safer when we are attacked. We can't give those grants now because we are under a continuing resolution.

Research to make America safe has stopped. Is that a wise thing for the new Republican majority in the House and Senate to do? Clearly, that is their plan. But we are going to give them an alternative and very quickly. Tomorrow we are going to consider a procedural motion about whether we go to this House bill, which has the five riders on immigration. I believe the Democrats will say: No, we want a clean bill, and we want to move to that bill quickly.

And we need to do it not just because we need to keep America safe—isn't that our first obligation?—but secondly because I do not believe our caucus—and I hope not a majority of the other caucus—has the same hate-filled feelings toward DREAMers that we have seen in the House of Representatives.

Mr. President, 600,000 of them have stepped forward. I have come to the floor day after day to tell their stories. They are the most amazing stories of young people who, with no help from the government, finished college and pursued professional degrees, without a penny of assistance from our government, whose only dream is to be part of the future of America. They are our future. They will help our economy. They will reduce our deficit. They will once again reestablish and reaffirm the American dream that people can risk everything to come to this country to make sure their children have a better life. These DREAMers deserve that chance. America deserves the chance to be properly secure in this age of terrorism. This Republican strategy is not going to achieve that.

I thank my colleague.

Mr. REID. Will my friend yield for a question?

Mr. DURBIN. I will be happy to yield for a question.

Mr. REID. My friend is modest, my friend the senior Senator from Illinois. But tell those within the sound of our voices how long you have worked on the DREAM Act—your.

Mr. DURBIN. I thank the Senator from Nevada, our minority leader. Fourteen years ago I introduced the DREAM Act, and I got into a spat with a Republican Senator, Mr. HATCH, who said: That is my idea.

I said: Fine. Then it will be the Hatch-Durbin DREAM Act.

And we introduced it 14 years ago, and it has not been enacted into law. Senator HATCH now has some misgivings over this issue, but I have stuck with it for 14 years. And the majority leader joined me in sending a letter to President Obama asking that he create this Executive order of protection.

I would like to say a word about Executive orders. Republicans come to the floor and suggest that when a President of the United States issues an Executive order, it is an unconstitutional exercise of power. You hear it over and over again.

If you step out of this Chamber and take just a few steps toward the staircase, you will see this magnificent, historic painting of Abraham Lincoln signing the Emancipation Proclamation. It is historic because, with the signature of President Lincoln, 3 million American slaves were freed—an Executive order. And it was an order which had the force of law. It was signed by President Lincoln—an Executive order.

It was not the only one. You think back in history to the historic Executive orders, and you have to think of Harry Truman. After World War II Harry Truman stepped up and said: We are going to integrate the Armed Forces of the United States of America, and I will not wait for Congress. Give me the pen and paper to sign the Executive order to achieve it.

So if President Lincoln can liberate 3 million American slaves, if President Truman can sign an Executive order integrating the Armed Forces, how can the Republicans come to the floor, one after the other, and say the use of an Executive order by the President is unconstitutional and want to hold President Obama accountable for their misguided thinking? It does not make sense.

I might just say—and I thought perhaps the Senator from Nevada was going to say it as well—if none of the Republicans like what President Obama has done on immigration, can I remind them they are now in majority control of the House and the Senate? If they think it is better to have a law enacted—despite the fact that for 2 years the House of Representatives refused to even call the bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform—if they think it is proper and right for a law to be enacted on immigration, the

American people have given them the majorities in both Houses to do it.

So instead of cursing the darkness and failing to fund the Department of Homeland Security, why don't they roll up their sleeves and go to work as Members of the House and Senate and pass immigration reform? I think that is worthy of this great body and the one across the rotunda. But to underfund the Department of Homeland Security that protects us from terrorism? What are they thinking?

I thank the Senator from Nevada for returning. It feels great to have you back in your capacity here as our leader on the Democratic side and as my friend.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). The Senator from Georgia.

WELCOMING BACK SENATOR REID

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I would like to add that we are glad to have Senator REID back. I know he has had a difficult time the last few weeks, and we are proud he is back on his feet.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be recognized to address the Clay Hunt suicide prevention bill, followed by Senator BLUMENTHAL from Connecticut.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CLAY HUNT SUICIDE PREVENTION FOR AMERICAN VETERANS ACT

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I want to give you a stark fact and figure. Every year 8,000 American veterans take their own lives and commit suicide. That is more people, more veterans than were killed in all the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We have a major epidemic in America's Armed Forces because of soft tissue issues of PTSD and TBI. This Congress, both Committees on Veterans' Affairs—in the House and Senate—have acted, and tomorrow this Senate will vote on the Clay Hunt suicide prevention bill. I want to talk about it for a few minutes because it is critically important.

When these men and women go overseas and volunteer to serve America and lay their lives on the line for us, many come back with terrible injuries, prosthesis, an inability to walk, some in wheelchairs. But the stealth disease, the one that hurts the most, the one that permeates the most, is PTSD and TBI. We have been doing as much as we could but not enough within veterans health care.

Secretary McDonald has committed himself to improving the services of mental health to our veterans. I have committed myself. Senator BLUMENTHAL has committed himself. Senator BOOZMAN from Arkansas, Senator MCCAIN from Arizona, who will speak later—all are committed to see to it that we have a better program for our veterans.

What the Clay Hunt suicide prevention bill does is create incentives for more psychiatric professionals to come into the VA health care system because psychiatry is the best physician expertise you need to deal with PTSD and TBI. But it also has external audits of the VA to make sure they are doing what needs to take place in terms of veterans health care and in terms of mental health for our veterans.

The tragedies are daily, the tragedies are compounding, and we must find an end to it. A lot of people think these tragedies are with veterans of the Gulf War, our Operation Iraqi Freedom, or our battle in Afghanistan. But, quite frankly, a lot of them are our Vietnam veterans. We looked the other way and did not recognize PTSD and TBI for a long time, but now we have recognized it front and center, and it is the major injury from the battles in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other conflicts in the history of the United States of America. We owe it to our veterans to have the best mental health available to them.

In my hometown of Atlanta, on August 21, 2013, I called a field hearing at Georgia State University and brought in all the VA experts on suicide prevention because, quite frankly, we had had three suicides in the Atlanta VA within a very short period of time that got high-profile headlines in our newspaper.

As it turned out, we found that we really did not have the followup, the follow-through, and the continuum of care that mental health needs and deserves, and we had some veterans who had fallen through the cracks—not just in Atlanta but around the United States of America. In fact, as recently as last week there was a tragic death in Atlanta. We do not know yet the root cause of it, but we know the individual may have had mental health problems and was a veteran of the war in Afghanistan and took their life and the life of their children. We do not know whether PTSD or TBI was the contributing cause or whether we had done anything wrong in terms of veterans health care. But we know this: Four more lives were taken from the stealth disease called tragic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder.

So I am very pleased as the chairman of the Veterans Affairs' Committee to tell you that the House unanimously passed this bill 3 weeks ago on the floor of the House, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee unanimously passed it 2 weeks ago in committee, and the bill we will vote on tomorrow can go directly from the floor of the Senate to the desk of the President of the United States and be signed.

Very quickly, I want to make two points for anybody who is listening that remembers last year. This bill failed last year. It failed for two reasons:

One, Members questioned whether we could afford it because it had a price tag of \$24 million. We have fixed the

price problem by taking internally generated funds of the VA to pay the \$24 million. That is done.

Secondly, some said: Well, this is a duplicative service. We already have mental health services and suicide prevention at the VA.

We have some, and we do not have enough. It is not duplicative. It is absolutely necessary and essential that we do what we are doing.

Mr. President, I am proud to come to the floor of the Senate on behalf of all of our veterans and tell them: Washington is watching. We are listening. We feel your pain. We understand the problems you have. And we are going to do everything we can to see to it that the Clay Hunt suicide prevention bill becomes the law of the land, that the VA is held accountable for its policies and procedure in mental health, and that we put an end and stem the tide of the tragic number of veteran suicides that take place every single day.

I would like to now yield to my ranking member on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, the Senator from Connecticut, who has done an overwhelmingly great job to see this through from beginning to end, Mr. BLUMENTHAL.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I begin by thanking the chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, Senator ISAKSON, and really giving him immeasurable credit for his courage and his fortitude in addressing this bill that he could have allowed to languish on the agenda of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. In fact, he made it the very first agenda item—the very first issue—that we would confront on the Veterans' Affairs Committee at our very first meeting, and it passed unanimously through the Veterans' Affairs Committee because of his leadership—and I really mean his leadership in making it happen.

So on behalf of the veterans of America, he deserves due credit, and so do my colleagues on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, Senator BOOZMAN and Senator SANDERS, who championed this bill, along with Senator BURR.

During the last session I was pleased to argue for it on the floor in the closing days of the session, and unfortunately it failed to pass.

There is no reason to look back and try to blame others for that failure. What is important is to look forward and to give credit to both sides of the aisle—most especially to my colleague, Senator MCCAIN, who, of course, dwarfs us in his service to our Nation in the Armed Forces. He literally is a giant in his service and sacrifice for our Nation while serving in the Navy. I have felt very privileged and proud to work with him and to introduce this measure, the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act or the Clay Hunt SAV Act, as it is called, that basically provides for suicide prevention